



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece by Lisa Raphals

Review by: Zhang Longxi

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Book Reviews

Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece. By Lisa Raphals. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992. Pp xviii + 273. $39.95.

Under the general editorship of Harvard classicist Gregory Nagy, the Cornell University Press Myth and Poetics series represents a concerted effort in recent scholarship to integrate literary studies with approaches of cultural anthropology and other disciplines for the understanding of some basic and important concepts in different cultural traditions. The earlier volumes in the series have examined ancient Greek myth, ancient Indic ritual, medieval Nordic sagas, and poetry and prophecy in European and Middle Eastern cultures and their sources in ancient Greece and biblical Israel. As a recent volume in the Myth and Poetics series, Lisa Raphals's book, in the words of the series editor, "extends the field even further" (ix), bringing its coverage beyond the Indo-European cultures to a study of wisdom and cunning in the philosophical and literary writings of China. Though actual comparisons of the Greek and Chinese treatments of wisdom and cunning are sparse and brief in her book, Raphals's discussion of Chinese materials is inspired by Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's important work on *mētis* or cunning intelligence in Greek culture, and the grafting of their critical approach onto her study of Chinese texts is, by and large, successful and fruitful, for it provides a methodological basis and a novel perspective in which Chinese texts of very different natures can be put together and examined for their understanding of the capability of knowing and its various ramifications.

In the first half of Raphals's book, the central issue is the meaning, function, and different attitudes toward what she calls "metic intelligence," a term derived from *mētis*, a Greek word with a wide semantic field that suggests its core of meaning as some kind of practical knowledge, skill, or resourcefulness, which in one way or another baffles logical definitions and disregards concerns of moral propriety. "*Mētis*," as Richard Klein explains in discussing Detienne and Vernant's book, "is not able to be thematized because it is a form of intelligence like the *savoir* of *savoir-faire;* it is the knowledge that philosophy, as Kant says, can never conceptualize, because it underlies the distinction between philosophy and its other: art."[1] This remark may help us understand the juxtaposition of philosophical and literary texts in Raphals's book for the exploration of the Chinese notion of metic intelligence. By looking at the usages and meanings of the word *zhi* 智 or 知 and some other related terms, Raphals tries to establish a similar semantic field in Chinese that reveals the moral ambiguities of metic intelligence and the ambivalence toward such intelligence in the Chinese tradition. Although earlier uses of *zhi* 知, *mou* 謀, *you* 猷 and the like in *The Book of Poetry* and other pre-Confucian texts display a whole range of meaning from the positively wise to the negatively cunning and deceptive, later usages in different philosophical

[1] Richard Klein, "The *Metis* of Centaurs," *Diacritics* 16 (Summer 1986): 3. This is a special issue of *Diacritics* devoted to the discussion of the works by Detienne and Vernant, and readers interested in knowing more about the two French scholars' works and their theoretical implications may find this issue particularly informative and helpful.

schools tend to limit the semantic range of *zhi* and the related terms in a variety of ways, depending on their different views on language and morality. By quoting and commenting on a large number of relevant passages from ancient texts, Raphals draws a clear picture of pre-Qin thought around a set of key terms.

Not surprisingly, as Raphals notes, for the Confucians "the importance of *zhi* is subordinated to that of *ren*—the realized humanity of the sage-king which is the *summum bonum* of Confucian virtue" (28). Given the vital importance accorded to *ren* as moral virtue and propriety, a steady moralistic trend permeates through Confucian teachings, whether we look at Confucius's advocacy of the rectification of names to counter misleading "clever words" (*qiao yan* 巧言), Mencius's promotion of a "humane government" (*ren zheng* 仁政) and his principled condemnation of war, or Xunzi's stern view of any deviation from linguistic and social norms and his denunciation of cunning and craftiness. The problem with such moralism, as Raphals argues, lies in its willful confinement of *zhi* to a morally good domain, its refusal to "acknowledge that the same capability may have many applications," and its inability or unwillingness to discriminate "between the faculty for intelligence (which includes cunning) and its application as either virtuous or vicious intelligence" (39). Yet the refusal to face the ambivalence of metic intelligence, as Detienne and Vernant have argued, is philosophy's (especially moral philosophy's) way to contain the dangerous potential of knowledge; and indeed the moralistic trend inhabits not just the philosophy of the Confucians but that of the Mohists as well. With "benefitting the people" as their goal, the Mohists are able to assume a practical view of language and knowledge, to develop the techniques of discrimination and argumentation (*bian* 辨), to recognize both the positive and negative potentials of skill (*qiao* 巧), even to establish a veritable "semantic field of metic intelligence" (66), but ultimately, as Raphals observes, they are not so different from the Confucians "in their practical and ethical orientation, in their explicit rejection of the use of cunning, and in their general distrust of the more subtle and deceptive capabilities of metic intelligence" (51).

The Taoists, on the other hand, are so radically skeptical of language and morality that they would negate all knowledge and conduct, and replace them with non-action and a mystic naturalism. Raphals does well to remind us that the different usages and meanings of terms need to be understood in the context of philosophical debates among the various schools of thought. Laozi's claim to eliminate and discard sagehood, wisdom, benevolence, rectitude, artfulness, and profit, his assertion that neither heaven nor earth nor the sage mete out benevolence, and that to do nothing is the only way to keep all things in good order, can thus be seen as proposing a Taoist naturalism in response to, and as a critique of, the Confucian concept of benevolence and the Mohist advocacy of moral action. While discarding the Confucian and Mohist knowledge, Laozi elevates a kind of "metaknowledge, an unmediated and 'natural' perception unimpeded by the normative categories of language" (76). He also elevates "great artfulness" (*da qiao* 大巧) and "great argumentation" (*da bian* 大辯) as the opposite of what the Confucians and Mohists would define as *qiao* and *bian* (see *Laozi*, 45). In a deliberate reversal of conventional language and definition, Laozi typically presents in negative terms the Taoist sage as someone foolish, clumsy, and weak, and describes the nature of *dao* as passive, compliant, and vulnerable, comparing it to water, an infant, a female, etc. And yet, it is clear that the reversal of conventional definitions and hierarchies in the *Laozi* inevitably leads to the conclusion that the weak will subjugate the strong, the feminine will overpower the masculine, and

so on and so forth. This is quite significant as it coincides with the way *metis* works in Greek culture as Detienne and Vernant portray it. "*Metis*," again as Richard Klein notes in summarizing their argument, "is the power of inversion, of the turning of tables in concrete, pragmatic circumstances."[2] Such radical reversals and metaphorical presentation leave a great deal of room for interpretation and development, and Laozi's teaching later branches out in rather different directions toward the Legalist doctrine via Han Fei, the Militarist applications via Sunzi, and the splendor of a new height of Taoism in Zhuangzi. Of special interest is Zhuangzi's "specific accounts of 'great knowledge' (*da zhi*) in operation" (87). He describes it as a practical yet ineffable "knack," exemplified by Chef Ding's skill in cutting oxen and by other such characters in similar stories. Like Laozi's metaknowledge, Zhuangzi's "great knowledge" is expressly differentiated from conventional knowledge available in books and attainable through learning. The reversal of conventional meanings in the Taoist texts thus suggests an attitude toward metic intelligence that completely eschews value judgement in moral terms.

In Raphals's book, however, the most straightforward validation of metic intelligence in the Chinese tradition comes from the Militarists and the Strategists, represented by such works as Sunzi's *Art of War* and the *Strategies of the Warring States*. Like the Greek preference of *metis* or cunning intelligence to *bie* or force and violence, the Militarist philosophy expounded in Sunzi's book emphasizes planning and calculation over sheer force and bravado, and it justifies the use of cunning and deceit as necessary means to the end of achieving military victory. The use of cunning, the emphasis on planning, calculation, deceit, and foresight also characterize the Warring States councillors and strategists, notably Su Qin and Zhang Yi, who deploy these skills in waging a "verbal warfare" of rhetoric and persuasion in order to help the ruler of a state establish political hegemony among competing powers. These political rhetors combine the military talents of a general (the realm of *wu* 武) with the master mind of a prime minister (the realm of *wen* 文), thereby pointing to both the tension between the two separate spheres and the eventual subordination of *wu* to *wen* in the Confucian value system. In the famous sixteenth-century novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the conflation of a strategist with a Confucian statesman finds a brilliant literary expression in the eminent figure of Zhuge Liang, the legendary prime minister of the kingdom of Shu.

The second half of Raphals's book thus turns from philosophy to literature and focuses on two novels from the Ming dynasty, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the *Journey to the West*, of which the central figures, Zhuge Liang and Pilgrim Sun, also known as the Monkey King, are popular and charismatic heroes. Although metic intelligence is morally suspect in much of Chinese philosophical writing, it becomes a defining characteristic of such heroic figures in the tradition of popular literature, out of which many classic Chinese novels have evolved. Putting novels and philosophy side by side, the difference between the two kinds of discourses becomes extremely prominent, and yet the treatment of metic intelligence serves to link them together. Because the *Journey to the West* is patently fictional and does not even pretend to retain any significant relation with its historical background—Xuan Zang's pilgrimage to India in the seventh century for acquiring Buddhist scriptures — the representation of metic intelligence in that novel is relatively simple, with no concerns of historical plausibility. Raphals sees some connection between metic intelligence and the

[2] Klein, "The *Metis* of Centaurs," p. 4.

Buddhist notion of *upaya* or skillful and expedient means to a good end, and it is by using such means, "an opportunistic measure of guile, argument, and coercion based upon cunning traps," that the goddess Guan Yin is able "to convert the selfish Monkey into a Buddhist saint" (180). In other words, the notion of *upaya* allows the efficacious use of cunning intelligence without stigmatizing it, and thus the novelist is able to present Monkey as a metic hero par excellence without having to raise a perfunctorily moral protest and to check his endless tricks and maneuvers in opprobrious language.

The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, on the other hand, offers a more complicated instance for examining the tension between history and fiction, moral principles and practical efficacy. The tension can be seen in the very evaluation of fictional characters, especially Zhuge Liang, who enjoys a great reputation among Chinese readers and audiences, immensely popularized not only by the *Romance* as a historical novel but also by plays, stories, and all forms of folk art and oral literature. But some modern scholars (for example, Hu Shi and Andrew Plaks, as cited on p. 151) find his intrigues and miraculous calculations rather unsavory. Seeing Zhuge Liang as a metic character "most classically associated with *zhi* in all of Chinese literature" (133), and also "an acceptable Confucian heroic figure whom the *Romance* seems to use to moralize the Militarist tradition and its associated problem of practical and cunning intelligence" (134), Raphals's own view tries to strike a balance between the scholarly and the popular, and acknowledges the ambivalence a metic hero necessarily engenders. The mainstream cultural tradition is able to absorb the popular image of Zhuge Liang only by subsuming his strategist type of talent under the usual Confucian values, especially loyalty to the sovereign. Indeed, the historical Zhuge Liang himself professes loyalty in his moving *Chu shi biao* 出師表, in which he recalls how Liu Bei came to his secluded cottage three times to know him and entrusted him with the task of rejuvenating the house of Han, to which he has dedicated all his talents and energy in repaying such recognition and trust. In the elevation and the near apotheosis of Zhuge Liang, loyalty to the house of Han is the most frequently emphasized virtue, whereas his failure to make Shu the winner of the three competing kingdoms is lamented as the inescapable tragic fate somehow predestined by Providence.[3] As C. T. Hsia argues, Zhuge Liang as depicted in the novel "must be seen first of all as a Confucian statesman," whose dedication to Liu Bei is ultimately a devotion to the dynastic orthodoxy of Han, "a united China under the rulership of the Liu house," rather than an expression of mere gratitude or personal appreciation.[4] Raphals's discussion is valuable in that it reminds us again of the problematic nature of the traditional image of Zhuge Liang, the taming of a metic hero in the moralization of the Militarist tradition and its corollary cunning intelligence.

Along with the elevation of Zhuge Liang as a good minister dedicated to his sovereign and a noble cause, the moralizing Confucian tradition is also responsible for

[3] Several poems by Du Fu on Zhuge Liang may be seen as concise and precise articulations of this traditional view. The best example is perhaps poem 5 of *Yonghuai guji wu shou* 詠懷古跡五首, "The great name of Zhuge rings over the world" 諸葛大名垂宇宙, in which Du Fu imputes the failure of Zhuge Liang's effort to the expiration of heaven's mandate, the already spent fortune of the royal house of Han. Du Fu's view of Zhuge Liang as a sage-like figure is evident in his other poems as well. See *Du shi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注, annotated by Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲, 5 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), pp. 736, 1278, 1353, 1506, 1674.

[4] C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 56-7.

the denigration of Cao Cao. As a historical figure, Cao is as versatile a strategist and has assimilated as many Confucian values in his character as Zhuge Liang.[5] In the *Romance* as in the popular tradition, however, he becomes a treacherous and unscrupulous villain, a foil to Zhuge Liang's positive image of a wise and loyal prime minister. The contrast, as Raphals remarks, "exemplifies the tension between wisdom and cunning in specifically moralized Confucian terms" (156). Here, of course, one can never overemphasize the role played by the traditional view already entrenched in the Tang that sees Han as the only legitimate dynasty at the time. Bearing the same family name as the Han emperor, Liu Bei was able to give his kingdom of Shu political legitimacy by making the claim that he intended to revive the declining royal house of Han, a claim based on kinship genealogy that his rivals, Cao Cao and Sun Quan, could not make. Although this rhetorical strategy did not succeed in real history at the time, it has worked in the favor of Shu and played an important part in elevating Zhuge Liang as a legendary hero with Confucian virtues over Cao Cao as a Machiavellian villain. Thus Confucian moralism finally prevails—in fiction, if not in reality. In reading the *Romance* as a historical novel, we are thus made aware not only of the tension between wisdom and cunning as abstract moral concepts, but also of the revision of history for a moral purpose, the recasting of history in conformity to a certain point of view, a certain way of reading, a certain set of moral principles that inform the fictional portrayal of historical figures in the Chinese novel. To heighten that awareness, to find a focal point where the complex and problematic relationship between cunning and wisdom, theory and practice, moral philosophy and historical reality, etc. is brought to our critical consciousness—that is Lisa Raphals's distinct and valuable contribution.

In a book of such wide scope, it is inevitable that one may find places where one would want to dissent from the author. In this case, however, I find myself in disagreement with the interpretation and translation of particular texts more than the basic approach or general argument, and I feel dissatisfied not so much with the substance of the book as with its form, its sometimes dry and stodgy prose. As for the choice of texts, one would wish that Raphals had included some discussion of *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, which, by providing a historical context for what is considered an indirect expression of Confucius's profound thoughts, accentuates the problem in the complicated relations between moral principles and historical reality. Since it is a historical commentary (*shi zhuan* 史傳) rather than an exegesis of the classic (*jing zhuan* 經傳), the *Zuo zhuan* has often been disparaged by Confucian scholars as less valuable than the other two commentaries, the *Gongyang* 公羊 and *Guliang* 穀梁, insofar as the exposition of Confucius's meaning is concerned.[6] By the same token, however, it has always been appreciated for its relatively vivid description of historical events. Many episodes in the *Zuo zhuan* could offer excellent occasions for discussion of the efficacious use of knowledge and intelligence vis-à-vis abstract moral imperatives. The old villager Cao Gui 曹劌 with his shrewd observations in the battle field may prove the importance of military talents (see *Zhuanggong*, the 10th year); and Duke Xiang of

[5] Cao Cao's political vision, as many commentators have noticed, is a combination of Confucian and Legalist ideas. The first two lines of Cao's poem, *Du guan shan* 度關山, if that can be taken as any indication of his political views, allude to Mencius 14.14: "Between heaven and earth, man is the most precious" 天地間，人爲貴 . See: *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nan Bei Chao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 , 3 vols., ed. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 1:346.

[6] See Jiang Boqian 蔣伯潛, *Shisan jing gailun* 十三經概論 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1983), pp. 427-28, 442-43.

Song's 宋襄公 defeat owing to his misplaced benevolence and his refusal to attack enemy troops before they have formed the battle array may serve as a warning against rigid adherence to moral principles (see *Xigong*, the 22nd year). These examples are here offered as possible support for Raphals's argument, not to suggest any serious lacunae in materials. But in the materials she has chosen to discuss, I do find a number of mistakes in translation or interpretation, some of which are obvious and some not.

For poem 198 in the *Mao shi*, Raphals's translation has these lines: "leap, leap crafty hare, but a stupid dog can catch him" (15). The "stupid dog" is *yu quan* 遇犬 in the original, a hunting dog in the field. On the same page, Raphals paraphrases the famous lines in *Mao shi* 57 and mentions the contrast of "the red of her artful (*qiao*) smile with the black and white of her beautiful eyes." But the word *qian* 倩 in 巧笑倩兮 describes the beauty of her smile without specifying any color. Even if it does specify a color, and according to *Han shi* 韓詩 it does, that color is pale white (*cangbai se* 蒼白色), not red. Following D. C. Lau's translation of the *Analects* 4.1, Raphals remarks that Confucius "describes benevolence as the most beautiful of neighborhoods" (28). I suspect that the usually very reliable Lau is here somewhat misleading, for the word *mei* 美 in 里人爲美 refers more appropriately to the morally *good* rather than the aesthetically *appealing*. We may compare this with the *Analects* 12.16: 君子成人之美，不成人之惡, which Lau aptly translates as "The gentleman helps others to realize what is *good* in them; he does not help them to realize what is bad in them." Some passages from the *Zhuangzi* are grossly misinterpreted. Raphals mentions Zhuangzi's paradoxes: "(1) There is nothing in the universe bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, but Mount Tai is small. *The infinitely fine tip of an autumn hair is bigger than Mount Tai because of the arbitrariness of the categories we use to measure space—large and small.* (2) No one outlives a doomed child, and Pengzi died young. *The `Methuselah' Pengzi is more short-lived than a child who dies in youth because of the arbitrariness of the categories we use to measure time*" (91, my italics). The italics are Raphals's interpretation of Zhuangzi's words, and her interpretation literally turns Zhuangzi's paradoxes into real absurdities. Notice that it is Raphals, not Zhuangzi, who is comparing the tip of a hair with a big mountain and a dead infant with an old man enjoying legendary longevity. What Zhuangzi does here is precisely *not* to compare the large with the small or the old with the young, otherwise he would have no choice but to use categories of measurement and make distinctions of things, which would run counter to the very idea he is expounding here, namely, the idea of all things being equal and undifferentiated (*qi wu* 齊物). In Zhuangzi's paradoxes, the two parts of the propositions (hair and mountain, infant and "Methuselah") are not measured against one another in comparison but measured against themselves, that is to say, they are paired together as self-contained entities in juxtaposition. As Wang Xianqian 王先謙 notes, though things differ in their shapes and sizes, "by their own nature, nothing is not self-sufficient. Therefore, when great means sufficient to its own nature, nothing in the universe is greater than the tip of a hair or smaller than Mount Tai."[7] In another passage, based on A. C. Graham's translation, Raphals has Zhuangzi saying that "supreme *ren* is cruel" (94). What Zhuangzi actually says is that "great benevolence is not benevolent" (*da ren bu ren* 大仁不仁). This of course alludes

[7]Wang Xianqian (1842-1917), *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解, in vol. 3 of *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954; rpt. 1986), p. 13. See also in the same volume Guo Qingfan (1844-95?) 郭慶籓, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, p. 39.

to *Laozi* 5.14 that heaven and earth and the sage are all "not benevolent" (*bu ren*). As Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 points out, *bu ren* may have two meanings, and it is important to differentiate *bu ren* as "cruel" from *bu ren* as "numb" or "without feeling." It is the second meaning that Laozi uses here to describe heaven or nature as utterly disinterested and unconcerned in benefitting human beings.[8] Whereas the Confucian notion of benevolence is a human concern, Zhuangzi's "great benevolence" is above human concerns. But to realize that it is "unconcerned" is one thing, to say that it is "cruel" is quite another. Just as to say that a flower is not red is quite different from saying that it is black. The Taoist great benevolence is above human desires and intentions; it does not favor anyone in particular, but it does not intentionally hurt anyone, either. It simply is what it is, and therefore it would be a mistake to characterize it as "cruel." In fact, Cheng Xuanying's 成玄英 (7th cent.) exegesis of this phrase, that "[Great benevolence] nurtures all things and loves all without any particular consideration 亭毒群品，汎愛無心," would help us understand Zhuangzi's meaning without much difficulty.[9] Some mistakes can be avoided if Raphals were more careful in her reading. For example, in dismissing the debates between the Confucians and the Mohists, Zhuangzi argues that all things are arbitrarily differentiated, they are either "this" or "that," namely, relative to one another. In Zhuangzi's original, "this" is *shi* 是, and "that" is *bi* 彼, but in Raphals's text, "that" is given a modern transliteration as "*na*" (90). On page 92, Wang Ni's 王倪 question, "How do I know that what I call knowing is not ignorance? How do I know that what I call ignorance is not knowing?" is wrongly attributed to Wang Ni's pupil Gaptooth 齧缺. In a book that discusses the semantic field of Chinese characters, transliteration without giving the original character, considering the large number of homophones in Chinese, can be frustrating. The Chinese character list at the end of the book (236-45) contains so many mistakes that its usefulness is seriously compromised. *Bian* 變 becomes 樂, *cai* 才 is corrupted into 寸, *cai shu* 才疏 becomes 才術, and most ridiculously, Xunzi's name, 荀子 becomes 句子, and Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮, so important a figure in the book, is listed as 箸葛亮.

Despite all the minor mistakes and imperfections, however, I believe that *Knowing Words* displays its author's impressively wide range of knowledge, that it offers some original and valuable insight into the way philosophical, historical, and literary discourses can be related and interact with one another, and that it will be read with interest and appreciation by students of Chinese literature, Chinese philosophy, and those interested in Chinese-Western comparative studies of philosophy and literature. As a book that consciously steps out of the traditional disciplinary bounds and examines the semantic valences of Chinese words and concepts in comparison with Greek ones, it has tremendous theoretical and methodological values that will go far beyond what it has actually achieved in the discussion of Chinese and Greek classics.

Zhang Longxi
University of California, Riverside

[8] See Qian Zhongshu, *Guan zhui bian* 管錐編, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 2:417-20.
[9] Quoted in Wang Xianqian, *Zhuangzi jijie*, p. 14.